



U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20207

OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE
AND ENFORCEMENT

Division of
Corrective Actions
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MAR 18 1994

O.B. Kelly
HUNTER-DOUGLAS, INC.
2 Park Way, Route 17 South
Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458

RE: HUNTER-DOUGLAS, INC.
Window Covering Cords

Dear Mr. Kelly,

As you may know, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is an independent regulatory agency charged with reducing unreasonable risks of injury presented by consumer products. Since 1973, the Commission has received reports of over 175 fatal window covering cord-related hangings of children. On the average, more than 10 hanging deaths to children involving window covering cords have been reported annually since 1981. Staff review of investigative reports of 47 deaths which occurred between 1988 and March 1992 revealed that cords containing a loop were involved in almost all of these cases.

Deaths to children less than 24 months old frequently occur when the child is in a crib near a window with the loop of the cord either in the crib or within the child's reach. Older children who are strangled on a window cord are usually playing with the cord. Victims range in age from 4 months to 7 years with a median age of approximately 15 months.

To notify the public of this hazard, with cooperation from the Window Covering Manufacturers Association of New York, NY, the Commission issued its first Safety Alert on December 20, 1985. Alarmed by the continuing deaths associated with window covering cords, the Commission reissued the Safety Alert during 1989. In July 1993, the Safety Alert was issued a third time with costs for printing absorbed by the Window Covering Manufacturers Association (see enclosed safety alert). These warnings, adopted voluntarily by the industry, have been publicized and included in packaging for new products.

In spite of these efforts to notify the public, the number of tragic child strangulations associated with window covering cords continue to mount. There were 18 such deaths reported in 1991, 16 deaths reported in 1992, and thus far, 11 deaths reported in 1993. Our most recently assigned investigation

involves the death of a 17 month-old Lakewood, Colorado boy on New Year's Eve 1993. According to the Denver Post, the napping child was found with a venetian blind cord wrapped around his neck.

To address the strangulation hazard posed by the future production of window coverings, the industry technical committee will be meeting with the American National Standards Institute on March 30 to convene a standards committee to develop an ANSI safety standard for window coverings.

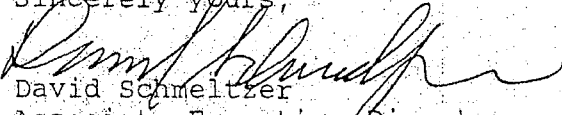
The Commission staff, however, is extremely concerned about those window covering cords in current production as well as those in consumer's hands. One possible method of addressing the hazard is the "Break-Thru" safety tassel. Following the near strangulation of a visiting 14 month-old child, Rick and Karen Langhart of Durango, Colorado invented a product that may reduce the risk of strangling on cords. This is a two-piece hexagonal plastic tassel that connects two cords and splits apart under pressure, thereby breaking the loop and preventing injury. The staff is currently evaluating the effectiveness of the safety tassel.

The staff is presently determining if the safety tassel is an appropriate "fix" to the strangulation hazard presented by window covering cords. A public notification campaign would be necessary to notify consumers of the strangulation hazard and of the availability of the safety tassel to prevent deaths.

To discuss the safety tassel and public notification program, the Commission staff is requesting your attendance at a meeting scheduled at 9:00 a.m. on March 31, 1994. The meeting will be held at 4330 East West Highway, Bethesda, Maryland. Within a few days of your receipt of this letter, Renae Rauchschalbe from the Division of Corrective Actions will be in contact with you to verify your attendance at the meeting. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Ms. Rauchschalbe on 301-504-0608, extension 1362.

We look forward to meeting with you and working with you on behalf of consumer safety.

Sincerely yours,


David Schmeltzer
Associate Executive Director
Directorate for Compliance
and Administrative Litigation

Enclosure: Safety Alert